

# CENTENARY OF ST. ANNE CHAPEL

● SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS, INDIANA

1876-1976

*Clockwise—*

*Diorama representation of 1876 procession*

*A procession of the 1950s*

*Traditionally the procession started at the  
campus church and Foley chapel—to join  
and proceed on to the St. Anne shrine*

*Closeup of altar with shell decoration*

*Archbishop Paul C. Schulte presided at the July 25  
devotions at the St. Anne chapel in 1959.*





**T**HIS year marks the centenary of the St. Anne Chapel in Providence Park, near the Sisters' cemetery at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The small chapel is a focal point of the Community's long-standing devotion to St. Anne, and its annual procession in honor of the saint on July 25, the eve of her feast. This devotion has been observed at Saint Mary's by the Sisters of Providence each year since 1844 to fulfill a promise made by their foundress, Mother Theodore Guerin.

- With Sister Mary Cecilia and two postulants, Mother Theodore was returning that year from France where she had sought funds for her struggling young community. When a terrible storm at sea threatened to capsize their small ship, Mother Theodore prayed to St. Anne, patron of sailors of her native Brittany on the northern coast of France. She promised both the procession and a chapel in the saint's honor if they would be spared. In one of her *Journals*, Mother Theodore vividly describes both the frenzy of the midnight storm and the seemingly miraculous rescue of the SS. *Nashville*:

"For some minutes there was absolute silence, then suddenly it was broken by an extraordinary crash as if the vessel had completely broken asunder. The ship had, in fact, been thrown upon the beam end and was now under water. The keel was above the surface and the tops of the masts below. The water was rushing in through every opening. It found its way into the hold, the cabin, and indeed everywhere. Soon our little bunk was almost submerged....

"The wind, which blew furiously from the southwest, veered around with the quickness of lightning (that was the captain's word) and blowing with the same violence from the northwest, reversed the wave which was engulfing us and saved the ship. A few minutes more and it would have been too late."

- Upon her return to Saint Mary's, Mother Theodore set about to fulfill her promise. A small chapel was built of logs and readied that same year of 1844 for the initial procession of Sisters of Providence to honor St. Anne.

After some 30 years, however, the logs began to give way, and in 1875 the original chapel was replaced by a substantial stone structure on the same site and with the same 15'x15' dimensions. The interior walls were decorated with iridescent shells brought from the Wabash River, and pressed into the soft plaster. The designs had been traced out

earlier by Mother Theodore and preserved by Sister Mary Joseph le Fer who now directed the novices in the work of decoration.

These designs included the outline of the *Nashville* to commemorate its preservation from the storm at sea; a map of Indiana showing the Providence missions established up to that time (1876); the intertwined initials A.M., J.M.J., and S.A.; the all-seeing Eye of God and other interesting designs. A brief account of the near-destruction at sea and the *Nashville's* preservation was inscribed in a series of shells near the doorway. A statue of St. Anne which Mother Theodore had brought from France was placed above the small stone built-in altar which was also delicately decorated with shells. These shell designs and ornamentation, preserved to the present, were to give the small shrine the popular name of "St. Anne's Shell Chapel."

- On July 25, 1876 the new "Shrine of St. Anne," as it was then called, was blessed by Father Chasse, and received its first woodland procession of Sisters of Providence to honor its patronal saint. Since then countless Sisters have followed in their footsteps. In the years when most all of the Community spent the summer at Saint Mary's, perhaps as many as 1,000 participated in the annual procession, traditionally led by the novices and postulants.

To the mosaic of a century each of these Sisters of Providence has contributed her share of fidelity to a promise. Even more each has been enriched by a beautiful tradition and devotion.

#### PRAYER TO ST. ANNE

Glorious St. Anne, filled with compassion for those who invoke you and with love for those who suffer, I cast myself at your feet and humbly beg you to take under your special protection the affair which I recommend to you. Vouchsafe to commend it to your daughter, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and lay it before the throne of Jesus so that He may bring it to a happy issue. Cease not to intercede for me until my request is granted. Above all, obtain for me the grace one day to behold my God face to face and to praise Him with you and Mary and all the saints throughout eternity. Amen.

Good St. Anne, mother of her who is our life, our sweetness, and our hope, pray to her for us and obtain our request. Amen.